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RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 2152  
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 4894  
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 6100  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 2479  
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA PRIORITY 0157  
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA PRIORITY 4223  
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 3906  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KATHMANDU 000697

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/19/2018  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [NP](#)  
SUBJECT: WHO WILL BE NEPAL'S FIRST PRESIDENT?

REF: A. KATHMANDU 689  
[1](#)B. KATHMANDU 630

Classified By: Ambassador Nancy J. Powell. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

#### Summary

[1](#)1. (C) As of June 19, major political parties of Nepal continued to bicker over the selection of the country's first president. Nepal's Constituent Assembly amended the Interim Constitution on May 28 to establish the largely ceremonial office, immediately after abolishing the monarchy. Competing with the Maoists' and Madhesis' top choice of Ram Raja Prasad Singh are Prime Minister G.P. Koirala and the UML's Madhav Kumar Nepal and Sahana Pradhan. Potential candidates also include Padma Ratna Tuladhar, a human rights activist, and Kul Gautam, a former high-level UN official.

#### Vying for the Presidency

[1](#)2. (C) On June 19, the three leading parties in the Constituent Assembly (CA) -- the Communist Party of Nepal - Maoist, the Nepali Congress (NC) and the Communist Party of Nepal - United Marxist Leninist (UML) -- continued to argue over who would become Nepal's first President, three weeks after the CA amended the Interim Constitution to create the largely ceremonial position (Ref B). The Maoists have backed away from their insistence on having both a Maoist president and prime minister, but they adamantly oppose both the NC's G.P. Koirala and the UML's M.K. Nepal. To break the stalemate, the parties must reach a consensus -- or two-thirds of the CA members would have to agree to amend the constitution to permit a simple majority to elect the President. Then presumably some combination of the Maoists and the UML or the Maoists and the Madhesis would be free to vote in their candidate (Ref A). Senior Maoist, NC and UML leaders told the Ambassador June 19 that their parties, which have well over two-thirds between them, had agreed to amend the constitution and that an amendment would be tabled and approved perhaps as early as June 20.

Ram Raja Prasad Singh

[1](#)3. (C) Ram Raja Prasad Singh, the elderly head of a

non-parliamentary, leftist Madhesi party, is the Maoist and Madhesi mainstream leaders' choice to be Nepal's first president. (Note: Madhesi support appears to be based largely on Singh's ethnic identity, not because of particular enthusiasm for his politics or record.) Singh shares a republican ideology with the Maoists and is particularly close to Madhesi armed groups in the Terai. Singh received amnesty in 1992 for a bombing that killed two hotel employees in Kathmandu in 1985, but he has yet to renounce the violence he perpetrated. Singh created the Nawa Janabadi Morcha (New People's Front) in 2006. He turned down the invitation to contest the April 10 CA election as the figurehead of the non-mainstream Madhesi parties, and his party subsequently failed to win any seats. His name first surfaced as a presidential contender in early May. Singh was born in 1936.

G.P. Koirala

14. (C) Girija Prasad Koirala is the presidential preference of the Nepali Congress and the Nepal Army -- and, according to the political counselor at the Indian Embassy, of New Delhi. He has been Prime Minister six times for a total of eight years since 1991. His longest stint as PM was during the first democratic government -- from May 1991 to November 1994. His second-longest stint is the current one, which began when the agitating parties chose him as the consensus candidate to head the government after the King reinstated the dissolved (and expired) 1999 Parliament in late April 2006. Koirala has been NC President since 1996. He was

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appointed to the CA as a proportional representation member from the NC. Koirala was born in 1925.

M.K. Nepal

15. (C) The UML would like Madhav Kumar Nepal, the party's former General Secretary, to be the President. He represents the status quo of the UML, and as a former Defense Minister could appeal to the Army. He has historically had good relations with the U.S. Embassy, but has repeatedly clashed with G.P. Koirala. M.K. Nepal is not a member of the CA. His resignation as UML General Secretary in April 2008 was in response to the party's relatively poor showing in the CA election -- and to his defeat in both of the constituencies he contested. M.K. Nepal was born in 1953.

Sahana Pradhan

16. (C) Foreign Minister Sahana Pradhan is the only female whose name has surfaced as a potential candidate for president. Although not as prominent as M.K. Nepal -- nor, Embassy contacts say, particularly qualified -- Pradhan may benefit from her stature within the left movement in general. She is the widow of Pushpa Lal Shrestha, one of the founders of the Communist Party of Nepal. Pradhan, a former high school and university teacher, is an economist by training. She is not a member of the CA. Pradhan, an ethnic Newar raised in Burma, was born in 1932.

Padma Ratna Tuladhar

17. (SBU) Padma Ratna Tuladhar is the Chairman of the Forum for Protection of Human Rights and a co-convener of the government-sponsored Peace and Conflict Management Committee. The human rights activist was a facilitator in peace negotiations between the Government of Nepal and the Maoists in 2001 and 2006. He served in the Panchayat parliament in the 1980s, protested for democracy in the 1990 People's Movement, and was Minister of Labor and Health in the UML government in 1994-95. Tuladhar is a prolific Nepali- and Newari-language author and playwright. He is not a member of

the CA. Tuladhar was born in 1940.

Kul Gautam

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¶8. (SBU) Kul Gautam, previously the highest-ranking Nepali in the United Nations, is a speculative media favorite for the presidency. The retired deputy executive director for UNICEF and UN Assistant Secretary General -- a longtime advocate for children's rights and human development -- is the only truly non-political candidate. Gautam, a Western-educated graduate of Dartmouth College and Princeton University, is not a member of the CA. Gautam was born in ¶1949.

Comment

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¶9. (C) On June 19, when the Ambassador asked former Prime Minister Sher Bahadur Deuba, the NC's no. 2 leader, who he thought was likely to be Nepal's first President, he responded: "God only knows." UML General Secretary Jhalanath Khanal, who was sitting next to Deuba, did not disagree. Later on, Khanal suggested that UML would support former Speaker of the Interim Parliament Subash Nemwang (not Sahana Pradhan) if M.K. Nepal could not be elected. The truth is that no one knows what the outcome will be. Several more wild cards are likely to surface before the parties settle on a decision.  
POWELL